

VZCZCXYZ0000
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSG #0484/01 1421209
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 221209Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4965
INFO RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 1498
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 6188
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ JUN BRASILIA 0912
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4409
RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 3979
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2101
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 2371
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS SANTIAGO 000484

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KWMNCI](#)

SUBJECT: BATTLE FOR CONGRESSIONAL NOMINATIONS FEATURES OLD FACES,
STOKES COALITION TENSIONS

Ref: a) Santiago 432
b) Santiago 448
c) Santiago 404
d) Santiago 126
e) 08 Santiago 1150

11. (U) Summary: In Chile's unusual congressional voting system, the two major coalitions are virtually guaranteed to each receive one of the two seats in each voting district. Because of this structure, decisions within coalitions about which candidates to run in which districts are contentious and competition for a nomination is fierce. At the very time that coalitions are trying to unite behind their presidential candidates, they are also facing internal battles for congressional nominations. Meanwhile, both coalitions play musical chairs with their congressional nominations: shuffling long-time politicians from one seat to another, while women and younger politicians are largely left out. End Summary.

Binomial Coalition Politics

12. (U) The binomial system forces political parties to participate in coalitions, generating a system with two main blocs (Ref A). It ensures representation for the minority bloc and the exclusion of any parties that are not in the first two vote-getting coalitions (the Concertacion and the Alianza). Occasionally, independent candidates have "broken" the binomial system -- current Senate Vice President Carlos Bianchi was elected as an independent when he beat out the Alianza list for second place in his far southern circumscription of Magallanes. However, the exception still proves the rule. Most Senate circumscriptions and Chamber districts have one Concertacion and one Alianza representative in each of the seats. The system also effectively excludes smaller parties, such as the Communist Party (PC), which does not receive enough votes to beat out one of the two main coalition lists to gain a seat (Ref B).

The Nomination: More Important than the Election?

13. (U) With twenty years of electoral data to crunch, and an electoral registry that has changed little since 1988 (Refs C and D) party experts can predict with some certainty where their coalition will receive most support. This has led some analysts to argue that the negotiation of the congressional candidate lists is the truly definitive moment for a potential candidate and for the parties, relegating the election itself to a mere confirmation exercise. While an exaggeration -- the electorate does serve up surprises --

this argument underscores the fundamental importance of intra-coalition negotiations for the congressional lists.

¶4. (U) Because the stakes are so high at this early stage, negotiations for congressional list nominations are contentious and often acrimonious, serving as a divisive force within coalitions at the very moment that the coalitions need to be unifying behind a single presidential candidate. Those wishing to run as independents must renounce their party affiliation by July. Thus April to June is a time for tense negotiations, intra-coalition squabbles and subsequent calls for unity. Candidates have until September 12 to register, and independents need a certain number of supporting signatures, depending on the district, to do so.

Tensions within Alianza Surface in Nomination Battles

¶5. (SBU) Tensions over congressional candidacies have already taken their toll in the Alianza. On April 15, UDI Senator Pablo Longueira resigned from Alianza presidential candidate Sebastian Pinera's (RN) campaign team. Longueira's decision was a reaction to RN's announcement that it would put up a strong candidate in a competitive Santiago district where UDI deputy and current President of the Chamber, Rodrigo Alvarez, is also planning to run. Longueira's stated reason: he is going to focus exclusively on the congressional campaigns of UDI candidates for deputy and senator (Longueira himself is not up for re-election until 2014). However, the real reason is crystal clear to analysts: RN's decision to run Nicolas Monckeberg, currently a popular deputy representing a district in southern Chile (and a Harvard grad), in Alvarez's district is a clear challenge to the sitting UDI Chamber of Deputies President.

¶6. (U) The Alianza has it a bit easier than the Concertacion in the negotiating process -- they are a two party coalition that splits the list of nominations down the middle, with one UDI and one RN on most Alianza congressional lists. The real fight is at the district by district designation of individual candidates and running mates. A strong candidate from each Alianza party may want to run in the same district, where, unless they manage to double, one of them is sure to lose. On the other hand, since the binomial system ensures that the weakest candidate on each list will most likely not be elected, each coalition has to convince candidates whose chances are slim to none to be running mates.

¶7. (SBU) The battle for nominations only exacerbates tensions between UDI and RN. Historically, Alianza has been plagued by disputes and tension, particularly between the more centrist and secular RN and the right-wing, staunchly Catholic UDI. In contrast, the Concertacion has been more unified, particularly from the end of military rule in 1990 until 2005 or so, according to conservative analyst Ena Von Baer. However, this pattern changed, as potential Concertacion presidential candidates vied for the nomination in the last year, and Alianza had been able to overcome these tensions and had been remarkably cohesive in the last year. But decisions about which candidates each party will nominate in which districts are causing old tensions to flare within Alianza. Both coalitions face tense months ahead, as jockeying for nominations will continue until the September 12 deadline to register electoral candidates.

Upstart Socialist Presidential Candidate Assembling His Own Team

¶8. (U) Upstart presidential contender Marco Enriquez-Ominami, a member of the Socialist Party, has burst onto the political scene in recent weeks, receiving 8 to 14 percent support in recent polls. Now the young deputy, part of a group known as the "unruly deputies" for their frequent failure to follow the Concertacion party line, has indicated that he intends to form his own list of congressional nominees.

¶9. (U) Meanwhile, the Concertacion has congressional headaches of its own. The Concertacion and leftist coalition Junto Podemos have been trying for weeks to reach an agreement to allow JP candidates to run on the Concertacion parliamentary slate (Ref B). The Communist Party agreed to an accord that would allow seven Juntos Podemos candidates (five Communists, one Humanist, and one member of

the Christian Left) to run as part of the Concertacion list, but it now looks as if the Juntos Podemos pact is unravelling, leaving a Concertacion-Communist Party pact. The Humanist Party, which was disappointed that it could not win agreement for more than one nomination, is in talks to join forces with Enriquez-Ominami and his supporters; the Green Party; the Independent Regional Party (PRI); Alejandro Navarro's Wide Social Movement (MAS); other "unruly" deputies; and former members of Chile Primero to form their own parliamentary slate.

Where are the New Faces?

¶10. (U) Younger politicians have complained about the lack of renewal in Chilean politics (Ref E), and the numbers back them up. In this year's elections, 88 percent of deputies will either compete for reelection or run for the Senate. The Senate is composed of 60 percent former deputies. In the last municipal elections in October, only 7 percent of candidates were younger than 35 years old. Only 13 percent of the nation's 120 deputies are under 40. The political class that came of age with the transition to democracy -- many of whom served in positions of power at a very young age -- shows no sign of stepping aside for the newer generation. Consolidated legislators may be able to leave their party and run successfully as independents within the binomial framework but up-and-coming politicians must have party support if they are to compete.

Women Need Not Apply?

¶11. (U) Women must also struggle mightily for that all-important party nomination. There are two women senators (one more than in

1953) and 17 women deputies, making women a grand total of 13 percent of the members of Congress--the lowest average in South America. In this year's election, of the current PS list of 115 pre-candidates, 17 are women. RN has proposed two new women on its list of pre-candidates. As one woman deputy running for the senate put it, "Every woman that enters [a list] means that a man has to step down, so there is no support."

¶12. (SBU) Comment: With elections looming at the end of the year, the political parties are in the midst of full-on intra-coalition negotiations. The Longuiera resignation from the Pinera presidential campaign is most likely only the first episode in this year's congressional list-making drama. While the machinations of the political parties and changing districts of their leading lights garner most of the press attention, the real story is that the same faces are vying for these jobs, while women and younger politicians sit on the sidelines. End Comment.